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Ancient Mexico in Miniature

*Pre-Columbian Clay Figures from the
Collection of Frances Pratt and Bumpei Usui*

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ANCIENT MEXICO IN MINIATURE

As exemplified in the small clay sculpture of Mexico, probably no other people of ancient times left such a tangible record of their daily life, both secular and religious. Ceramic art was highly developed as early as 1500 B.C., in the Valley of Mexico, and the tradition was widespread throughout the country until the Spanish Conquest in 1521.

With the exception of mold-made pieces produced from late Maya through Aztec times, miniature sculpture was freely modeled. Pre-Classic figures, or those dating before or around the first century of the Christian era, relied heavily on a technique of rolling pellets of clay and appliqueing them on the main body as facial features and adornments. It is interesting to note the finesse with which elaborate coiffures and jewelry were executed, and the apparent regard in which high fashion was held. Though probably significant as fertility figures, those from Tlatilco, Chupicuaro and Michoacan reflect a stylishly coiffed and ornamented, though otherwise, nude people.

After the first century A.D., a great variety of genre work, illustrating daily life, was produced in Western Mexico, particularly in the states of Colima, Nayarit and Jalisco. While applique was still used, forms were inclined to be more fully expanded, and there was increased use of color and burnishing.

Figurative work from the Vera Cruz area represents a number of periods, from the early, simplified Panuco figure through later, naturalistic ceremonial representations. It is generally true that the later works reflected a more sophisticated religious concept. This is apparent in the Aztec period where temples and important personages were frequently portrayed.

ANCIENT MEXICO IN MINIATURE

Apart from their story-telling significance, Pre-Columbian miniatures have an aesthetic appeal due, in large measure, to the reverent convictions of their makers. The figures transcend time and place to make a universally recognizable artistic statement.

Frances Pratt

From Valley of Mexico
Pre-Classic period (c. 1500 - 500 B.C.)

1. STANDING "GHOST" FIGURE
Canitas, 2 1/4"
2. STANDING FIGURE (Olmec)
Puebla, 4 1/8"
3. STANDING FIGURE
Tlatilco, 3 3/8"
4. ELONGATED FEMALE FIGURE
Tlapacoya, 4"
5. STANDING FEMALE FIGURE WITH SKIRT
Tlatilco, 3 1/4"
6. FEMALE DANCER
Tlatilco, 3 1/8"
7. STANDING FIGURE
1 3/4"
8. DOUBLE HEADED FIGURE
1 7/8"
9. STANDING FIGURE
Tlatilco, 2 1/2"
10. STANDING FIGURE WITH LEAF CROWN
Tlatilco, 4 3/8"
11. ANIMAL (Tejon)
Tlatilco, 1"
12. SEATED FIGURE
Tlapacoya, 2"
13. STANDING FIGURE WITH MASK
Michoacan, 4"
14. STANDING FIGURE, HANDS ON HAIR
Michoacan, 3 7/8"
15. DOGS, RUNNING
Michoacan, 1 3/4"

16. STANDING FIGURE, DOUBLE HEADED
BABY
Michoacan, 1 3/4"
17. STANDING FIGURE, BRAIDED
HEADDRESS
Chupicuaro, 4 3/8"
18. STANDING FIGURE WITH FLOWER
EARRINGS
Michoacan, 4"
19. STANDING FIGURE WITH TURBAN
Michoacan, 4 3/4"
20. SEATED FEMALE FIGURE WITH
HEADDRESS
Cuanalan, 2 1/8"

From State of Guanajuato
Late Pre-Classic period (c. 400 B.C. -
100 A.D.)

21. STANDING FIGURE, ARM UPRAISED
Chupicuaro, 2 1/2"
22. STANDING FIGURE
Xalostoc, 2 3/8"
23. STANDING FIGURE
Chupicuaro, 4"

From Valley of Mexico
Pre-Classic period (c. 1500-500 B.C.)

24. STANDING FEMALE FIGURE
El Arbolillo, 5 1/4"
25. FIGURE IN REGALIA
Tlapacoya, 6 1/4"

From State of Guerrero, Western Mexico
Pre-Classic tradition (c. 200 B.C. -
200A.D.)

26. STANDING MALE FIGURE
2 3/4"

27. STANDING FIGURE WITH BABY
2 "

28. STANDING FIGURE
4 1/2"

From Valley of Mexico
Pre-Classic period (c. 1500 - 500 B.C.)

29. STANDING FIGURE (Panuco II)
Vera Cruz, 3 3/4"

From State of Colima, Western Mexico
Early Classic period (c. 300 - 600 A.D.)

30. DOG
2 1/2"

31. DOG
1 7/8"

32. DOG
1 3/4"

33. STANDING FIGURE HOLDING BABY
3 3/4"

34. SEATED MOTHER WITH BABY AND
SUNSHADE
4"

35. CHILD SEATED ON A STOOL
2 3/8"

36. A PUPPY
3/4"

37. BABY IN CRIB
1 1/8"

38. MOTHER HOLDING BABY
2 1/2"

39. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A WARRIOR
FIGURE
4"

40. WARRIOR WITH SHIELD
4"

41. TWO MEN PLAYING A DRUM
2 1/4"

42. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF STRONG
MAN
1 7/8"

43. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF STRONG
MAN
2 1/8"

44. A CHIEF IN A PALENQUIN
CHIEF 1 7/8"
PALENQUIN 3 1/8"

45. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF STRONG
MAN
2 3/8"

46. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF STRONG
MAN
2 1/8"

47. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF STRONG
MAN
2 1/2"

48. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF HUNCHBACK
2 1/2"

49. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF SEATED
FIGURE
2 1/2"

GROUP OF SEVEN DANCERS:

50. 3 7/8"

51. 3 3/8"

52. 3 3/8"
53. 3 1/4"
54. 3 1/2"
55. 3 1/2"
56. 3 3/4"
57. A DRUMMER
2 1/8"
58. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A BIRD
2 1/2"
59. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A MAN
WITH A FISH'S HEAD
3 3/8"
60. BOUND FIGURE WITH A DOG
1"
61. STANDING FIGURE
4 7/8"
- GROUP OF THREE RECLINING FIGURES:
62. 2"
63. 2 1/2"
64. 2 3/4"
65. ACROBAT
2 1/4"
66. THREE FIGURES PERFORMING A RITE
4"
67. A COUPLE EMBRACING
2"
68. PEACOCK WITH DOG
4 1/4"
69. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A PEACOCK
WITH DOG
4 1/2"
70. FIGURE SEATED ON A STOOL
4 1/2"
71. AN AFFECTIONATE FAMILY: FATHER,
MOTHER AND BABY (Baby's head
is missing)
3 1/8"
72. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF FIGURE
WITH PLATE AND JAR
3"
73. STANDING COUPLE
5 1/4"
74. SEATED COUPLE
3 3/8"
- From State of Nayarit, Western Mexico
Early Classic period (c. 300-600 A.D.)
75. DOG STANDING ON HEAD OF A
SEATED FIGURE
3 3/8"
76. VESSEL IN THE FORM OF A SEATED
COUPLE
3 1/8"
77. FATHER HOLDING HIS SON ON HIS
SHOULDERS
4 3/4"
78. SEATED FIGURE WEARING A FANCY
CAPE
2 3/4"
79. SEATED FIGURE WITH TWO DOGS
3 3/8"
80. SEATED FIGURE DRINKING FROM
A BOWL THROUGH A TUBE
3 3/4"
81. SEATED FIGURE WITH A BABY
(Chinesco)
3 1/4"
82. SEATED FIGURE WITH SHIELD
(Chinesco)
2 7/8"
83. SEATED FIGURE WITH BABY
(Chinesco)
4 3/8"

- 84. SEATED FIGURE (Chinesco)
2 3/8"
- 85. SEATED FIGURE PLAYING MUSICAL
INSTRUMENT
3 3/4"
- 86. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A COILED
SNAKE
3/4"
- 87. SEATED FIGURE WITH PARASOL AND
DOG
5 1/4"
- 88. CURLED UP DOG
1 1/2"
- 89. RECUMBENT FIGURE WITH ATTENDANT
2 3/4"

From State of Jalisco, Western Mexico
Early Classic period (c. 300-600 A.D.)
or earlier

- 90. SEATED MOTHER AND BABY
5 1/8"
 - 91. STANDING FIGURE
4"
 - 92. STANDING FIGURE WEARING EARRINGS
AND NECKLACE
3 3/4"
 - 93. SEATED MOTHER AND BABY
4 1/2"
 - 94. SEATED FIGURE OF WOMAN WITH A
LONG NOSE
5 1/4"
 - 95. MALE FIGURE
2 7/8"
 - 96. FEMALE FIGURE
3 1/2"
 - 97. SEATED FIGURE HOLDING A FLOWER
3 1/2"
- From State of Vera Cruz
Classic period (c. 300-600 A.D.)
Figures 98-105, 107-109, 112 &
116, from Remojadas
- 98. SEATED MONKEY, EATING
3 1/2"
 - 99. SMALL MONKEY
1 1/4"
 - 100. MOUSE
2"
 - 101. MONKEY
3 1/2"
 - 102. FIGURE WEARING A HELMET
3 1/2"
 - 103. FIGURE WEARING A HAT
4 1/4"
 - 104. FIGURE WEARING A CAPE AND
HELMET
3 3/8"
 - 105. SEATED MAN WITH ARMS CROSSED
ON KNEES
3 1/2"
 - 106. FIGURE WEARING BIRD MASK
3 1/2"
 - 107. FIGURE WEARING ANIMAL MASK AND
HOLDING MUSICAL INSTRUMENT
4 7/8"
 - 108. FIGURE, POSSIBLY AN EXECUTIONER
3 7/8"
 - 109. FIGURE WEARING A BIRD MASK
4 1/2"

110. A WHISTLE
4 3/8"

111. A WHISTLE
3"

112. MOTHER AND BABY
4 1/2"

113. FIGURATIVE WHISTLE
2 1/4"

114. A WHISTLE
3 1/2"

115. A WHISTLE
3 1/4"

116. WHISTLE
4 1/2"

117. FIGURE WITH ELEPHANT MASK
4 1/2"

118. FIGURE WEARING ANIMAL MASK
4 1/8"

119. WHISTLE IN THE FORM OF A BAT
3 1/2"

120. FANTASTIC FIGURE
4 1/2"

121. FANTASTIC FIGURE
4"

From Valley of Mexico
Pre-Classic tradition (c. 200 B.C. -
200 A.D.)

122. SEATED FIGURE WITH FEATHERS
Teotihuacan, 2"

123. SEATED FIGURE
Teotihuacan, 2 1/8"

124. SEATED FIGURE
Teotihuacan, 1 1/2"

125. STANDING FIGURE
Teotihuacan, 4 3/8"

126. STANDING FIGURE
Teotihuacan, 4 3/8"

127. SEATED FIGURE WEARING CAPE
Teotihuacan, 3"

128. SEATED FIGURE WEARING A HAT
Teotihuacan, 2 1/2"

129. STANDING FIGURE WEARING CAPE
AND WIDE HAT
Teotihuacan, 5 3/8"

130. SEATED FIGURE BLOWING ON A
CONCH
Teotihuacan, 2 3/4"

131. MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IN THE FORM
OF A STANDING FIGURE
Teotihuacan, 4 1/2"

From State of Yucatan
(c. 700 - 1000 A.D.)

132. OWL
Maya, 3 1/8"

133. OWL
Maya, 3 3/4"

134. FIGURE OF AN OFFICIAL
(Island of Jaina)
Maya, 3 1/8"

From Valley of Mexico and State of
Vera Cruz
(1300 - 1500 A.D.)

135. SEATED FIGURE
Aztec, 4 5/8"

136. SEATED FIGURE
Aztec, 4 5/8"

137. MINIATURE TEMPLE SURMOUNTED BY
WIND GOD
Aztec, 3 1/4"

138. STATUETTE OF WIND GOD
Aztec, 3 1/8"

139. SEATED FIGURE
Aztec, 4 3/4"

140. DOUBLE TEMPLE
Aztec, 3 3/4"

141. TEMPLE WITH A STEEP ROOF
Aztec, 3 3/4"

142. TEMPLE WITH A PEAKED ROOF
Aztec, 4"

143. ROUND TEMPLE WITH A STEEP ROOF
Aztec, 4"

144. ROUND TEMPLE
Aztec, 3 3/4"

145. DOUBLE TEMPLE
Aztec, 3 3/8"

146. WIND GOD ON TEMPLE
Aztec, 6 1/2"

147. ROUND TEMPLE
Aztec, 3 7/8"

148. TEMPLE WITH CONICAL ROOF
Aztec, 5"

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